Innovative Workplace Manufacturing

Vice President of Sales

Candidate Summary

Interview Conducted in Chicago, April 26, 2012

Mr. Benjamin Davis  
4624 Apple Grove Drive  
Chicago, IL 65602  
(270) 444-4444

Benjamin is currently the President of Garnet North America, where he has full P&L responsibility for all sales, marketing, customer service, product development, and design for a $400MM division of a $700MM manufacturing organization whose products include commercial furniture, casegoods, ready-to-assemble bedroom furniture, entertainment furniture, and other furniture products sold to the electronics, mass market, and home furnishing channels. In this capacity which he has held for two years, Benjamin has eight direct reports including the Vice President of Merchandising and Marketing, the Vice President of Product Development and Marketing, the Vice President of Customer Service, and three Vice Presidents of Sales who are over the home furnishings, big-box retailers, and commercial sales arenas with a total staff of approximately 2000 individuals. Benjamin is one of three Presidents at Garnet who report to the President of Garnet Industries, a manufacturing organization with revenue of over $700MM. The other two Presidents, who are Benjamin’s peers, are the President of Garnet Europe and the President of Texttech, a small textile technology subsidiary.

Prior to being promoted to President of Garnet North America, Benjamin was the President of Garnet Office, where he had full P&L responsibility for all office furniture sold through office superstores for home use as well as Garnet’s expansion into the commercial arena with revenues of $220MM. Benjamin had four Vice Presidents reporting to him who were responsible for Customer Service, Merchandising and Marketing, Product Development and Marketing, as well as Sales for distribution to the office furniture dealers, office superstores, wholesalers, and mail-order accounts. While in this role for sixteen months, Benjamin successfully grew the business by 10% during one of the worst economies in years for the office furniture industry.

In his current role, Benjamin emphasized that he has been instrumental in developing and renegotiating major contracts with numerous customers, rebuilding a sales force, hiring and firing the right rep groups, instituting a design and marketing department, and bring a “new spirit” into the organization. Garnet is currently undergoing reorganization and Benjamin is concerned about the upcoming changes that are certain to occur in the next six months.

Prior to joining Garnet, Benjamin was the Executive Vice President of Distribution for Laughton Industries, a privately-held $600MM mid-market commercial office furniture manufacturer headquartered in Ohio, for four years. As Executive Vice President of Distribution, Benjamin had full P&L responsibility for $300MM of Laughton’s business. This included all of the company’s furniture and seating lines sold through the traditional office furniture dealer channel, which was supported by 12 distribution centers throughout the United States. Each of the 12 Presidents/General Managers of the distribution centers reported directly to Benjamin and each distribution center was set up as a stand-alone business with its own inventory, marketing, and sales team, which created a sense in each city that a customer was doing business with a local entity. In addition to the 12 Presidents, each location had Managers over Inventory, Finance, IT, and Administration. Benjamin had a total staff of 150-170 individuals including approximately 60 in the field sales group who reported through the Presidents of each distribution center, all of whom were Laughton employees.

When asked what he did to improve efficiency in the business, Benjamin replied that he orchestrated three new start-up distribution centers and split off two others, which rapidly grew Garnet’s market presence in New Jersey, Portland, San Diego, Orlando, and Minneapolis/St. Paul and impacted sales tremendously. He also stated that through basic fundamental management, aggressive inventory management, working closely with the factory to streamline order processing and inventory, and building rapport with internal “stakeholders,” he was successful in rapidly growing the business. Benjamin mentioned that he focused on the factory floor using Lean and Kaizen manufacturing principals to improve gross margins and streamline the factory which resulted in a significant increase in the return on investment, inventory turns, and a division-wide growth rate of 23% throughout his time there. Benjamin also indicated that he refocused the product development efforts to target the architectural and design communities, which resulted in winning a number of national contracts with Fortune 500 companies around the country, including Chase Bank.

Prior to joining Garnet as the Executive Vice President of Distribution, Benjamin had a seven-year track record of success with Belmont Industries, based in Chicago, IL, a $200MM international manufacturer of commercial office furniture. The majority of Belmont’s sales force calls directly on end users with some focus on designers and dealers. The company’s primary customers in priority are colleges and universities, health care, GSA, and commercial customers. In his most recent position with Belmont as Vice President of the Midwestern Region, Benjamin was one of three regional Vice Presidents in North America who reported to the Vice President of Sales. He managed an $82MM sales organization for the Midwestern United States including Ohio, Wisconsin, Kentucky, Minnesota, and Illinois. While in this capacity for approximately four years, Benjamin led a sales team of 72 that included approximately 35 direct Belmont sales employees and 37 independent rep groups scattered throughout the Midwestern region. When asked what he did specifically to grow the business from $33MM when he started as the Vice President to $82MM four years later, Benjamin responded that a big part of the reason was the relationship that was established with Hewlett-Packard. This relationship was built when Benjamin and his team defined a need and convinced the President and CEO of Belmont and the executive management team to develop a mini business plan on how to develop that account, which subsequently evolved into Belmont’s new business unit, focused on high tech/fast-growth entities. This custom solutions per company focus evolved into Belmont developing a marketing slogan of “One Customer, One Solution,” which essentially indicated to each customer, such as Hewlett-Packard, that Belmont would treat them as a unique market with individual needs and would provide custom solutions, essentially trying to convey to each customer that it was a market unto itself. As a Vice President, Benjamin traveled extensively throughout the Midwestern region working with his sales reps and customers, but also had extensive interaction at headquarters in Chicago, where he was based, to help drive specific customer solutions for special needs for many large accounts in the Midwest.

Prior to being promoted to the position of Vice President of the Midwestern region, Benjamin was a District Manager for Belmont based in Chicago, Illinois, for three years. In this role, Benjamin took over a $400,000 territory previously run by an independent rep, opened an office, hired an associate, and, based on results, opened up a showroom after his first year in Chicago. During his three-year tenure in this capacity, he built the operation from a $400,000 sales territory to $5.2MM before being promoted to the corporate headquarters as the Midwestern Regional Vice President of Sales at age 34. Benjamin also traveled to various locations and made presentations for state government contracts and positioned why Belmont should be an approved vendor for state contracts. Based on this exposure as well as the exposure internally in budget meetings, Benjamin caught the eye of the Vice President of Sales and Marketing and he was elevated in the company.

Before joining Belmont, Benjamin was in roles of increasing responsibility, culminating in his capacity as the Vice President of Sales and Marketing for Golden Solutions, a mid-market systems furniture manufacturer based in Oakland, for six years. During his tenure in this role over sales, marketing, product engineering, and customer service, Benjamin was successful in increasing revenue from $10MM to over $50MM with a 19% operating income improvement. He had responsibility for four Regional Sales Managers as well as numerous rep groups throughout North America. Benjamin began his career as a Sales Representative with Golden after graduating with his Bachelors of Business Administration degree from the Ohio State University in 1990 and received his MBA from the Kellstadt School of Business at DePaul University in 1997.

In describing how he has taken average performers and turned them into superior performers over the years, Benjamin stated that he is passionate about mentoring others, especially individuals who possess a lot of talent but have been directionless or younger individuals with great potential who need reassurance and guidance. He enjoys helping them discover ways to achieve their goals and believes that taking the time to show that they matter to him and that he believes in them is extremely critical in building confidence and success.

In describing how he felt he was viewed by the executive management team at Garnet, Benjamin stated that he is known as someone who has very defined goals and objectives, who holds his people accountable, and makes tough business decisions constantly. He stated that prior to him being President, the approach from sales management was that decisions were made based on what the sales team wanted versus what was objectively best for the organization. Benjamin, however, approaches business with what is right to do for the business first, and what is right for the sales team second. He also stated that he a great team builder and good at identifying talent, mapping out a career game plan for the top contributors, and living up to his word by giving them opportunities when they perform.

Benjamin described his management and leadership style as very participative; he stated that he builds consensus with individuals, but at the end of the day, someone has to make the decision and that responsibility usually resides with him. He obtains input, sources through it, and if it is not a key decision, he will give his two cents and delegate it. If it is a key decision, he will make the call. He stated that he has been successful in building solid teams with individuals who are better in a particular discipline than he is and consequently lets them do their job the majority of the time. He also stated that he holds people accountable for results and that when he is new in a role he delves into the details because he wants to understand if the person who has been running it knows what they are doing. If so, he lets them do their job. If he determines that they are not as capable as he would like, he works closely with them until they either “get it” or he gets someone else to run that sector of the business. He also stated that he leads by example through his dedicated, tenacious work ethic and that he demands a lot.

Benjamin is 45 years old, married for over 20 years, and has one daughter who is a freshman at Pomona. He has relocated previously and is willing to do so again for the right long-term career opportunity. Benjamin is very personable, bright, and develops rapport easily. He emphasized that he has consistently asked for challenging positions throughout his career in which he can make a difference in turn-around situations and also that he has been successful in similar roles. He continued by saying that he is a driven, high-energy individual who is passionate about building and leading high-performance teams and that this is a position as well as an organization that he is very excited about.